

Beginning of

The organization of the primitive Christian Church

This title was preceded by

The idea personality as a basis of ethics
Clement of Alexandria : his life and writings
The religious aspects of the theory of value

And is continued by

The later life of St. Paul after the close of the Acts of
the Apostles

Search by above titles on archive.org to
continue reading this collection of Pacific
School of Religion Theses from 1931
call number Thesis Cage 1931 v.2



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
Graduate Theological Union

<https://archive.org/details/b14098258>

"THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN CHURCH"

by

Charles B. Mobley

B.A. University of Valparaiso 1919

Submitted in the Department of New Testament
Literature in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in the Pacific School of
Religion December 1930

OUTLINE OF THESIS

I. Introduction, Stating the Problem.

1. The inception of the Christian movement. Page 1.

a. Began with Jesus of Nazareth among the Jews.

b. Men logically led to accept Jesus as Messiah.

2. Jesus reveals himself. Page 4.

a. Disciples were disturbed over his crucifixion.

b. Resurrection reanimated their hope.

3. Development of the Primitive Christian Church. Page 6.

a. Jesus did not leave an organized body.

b. Believers formulated such plans as needed.

c. Primitive Church had no fixed constitution.

CHAPTER I

The Literature of the Primitive Christian Church

I. Not developed Simultaneously with the Church.

1. Synoptic Gospels of little authority on church, p. 7.

a. Reflects the teachings of Jesus.

b. Church of a later period is reflected.

2. Paul, earliest and most authentic writer. Page 9.
3. Acts depicts the Primitive Church. Page 12.
 - a. Can be verified by the letters of Paul.
 - b. Considered authentic by Church Fathers.
 - c. Considered authentic and in Canon of Muratori.

CHAPTER II

The Usage of the Term Church in the Apostolic Age

- I. The Meaning of the Term was not New.
 1. Paul is earliest N.T. writer to use term. Page 24.
 - a. Church in existence then about two decades.
 - b. Later usage shows a more complex organization.
 2. Term had a pre-Christian usage. Page 25.
 - a. To Israel, an assembly for religious worship.
 - b. To Greek, for business or social matters.

CHAPTER III

The Organization of the Primitive Christian Church

- I. The Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem.
 1. Information relative its organization. Page 28.
 - a. Book of Acts.

- b. Personnel of pre-Pentecostal assembly.
 - c. Influence of the Synagogue.
 - d. Earliest conceptions of an organization.
2. The selection of the seven. Page 36.
- a. Their relation to the deacons of later age.
 - b. Grew out of an immediate need.
3. Officers of the Primitive Christian Church. Page 45.
- a. Apostles.
 - b. Prophets.
 - c. Elders.

CHAPTER IV

The Organization of the Primitive Christian Church (Beginning at Antioch)

- I. Early Christians Driven from Jerusalem.
- 1. Contribution toward organizing of refugees. Page 60.
 - a. The Jewish Synagogue.
 - b. The Mystery-Religion Associations.
 - c. Prophets and teachers.
 - 2. Position of those called by title. Page 63.
 - a. Wrong conceptions brought confusion.
 - b. The simplicity of the plan revealed by Paul.

CHAPTER V

The Closing Period of the Apostolic Age

I. Much Confusion over Titles and Functions.

1. The apparent cause of this confusion. Page 72.

a. Titles of this period fluid.

b. Function of office primary, title minor.

2. Results caused by confusion of titles. Page 75.

a. The church at close of Apostolic Age.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Christian movement had its first visible inception and commitment within a very small circle. This circle consisted of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, who were evidently drawn to him by his unique personality, and eventually they became convinced that he was in reality the Christ.¹ The conception which the disciples had of Jesus has been given a very prominent place by Mark, Matthew, and Luke, authors of the life of Jesus, written several decades after the close of his ministry.

' The disciples had been logically lead to their conclusion, since Jesus came offering himself to the people in a prophetic manner, and apparently at an opportune time,² and asked them to "repent for the Kingdom of heaven was at hand"³ Jesus, like John the Baptist who preceded him, spoke against the current practices of Judaism as a limited interpretation of the commands of God, and assured those who would follow after him, that he had not come to destroy their law, but had come to bring to them a fuller realization of its true meaning.⁴ Later

1.Mk.8:29; Mt.16:16; Lu.9:20.
3.Mt.4:17.

2.Mt.4:13-16.
4.Mt.5:17.

in his ministry, he gave his disciples information relative to the Kingdom of God, its laws, conditions of membership in it, but not the person of the King. However, he made approaches to this personal subject in the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom, implying the presence of the King, and has made a veiled claim to the title in calling himself, 'the Son of Man'; but hints and suggestions have been all!¹

By investigation, this title, "Son of Man" is found not to be a new title, nor one of Jesus' own creation. The Psalmist has made use of it,² the prophet Ezekiel uses it extensively, revealing that others addressed him as "Son of Man"³ Daniel likewise uses the title, but his usage has more of a Messianic conception,⁴ somewhat in keeping with that ascribed to Jesus by each of the evangelists.⁵ Jesus called himself "the Son of Man" without hesitation; evidently while the phrase expressed much to him, it must also have meant much to those immediately associated with him, since their expression reveals, that they saw in him "the Christ"⁶

When Jesus had made his impression on his disciples, he then drew from them both the

1.Gould, "International Critical Commentary," page 152.
 2.Psalms 80:17. 3.Ezek.2:1. 4.Dan.7:13. 5.Mt.24:30; Mk.13:26; Lu.21:27. 6.Mk.8:29b.

in his writings, he gave the title of "King" to Jesus, a title relative to the kingdom of God, the Israel, condition of membership in it, but not the title of king. However, a number of passages in the New Testament suggest that the announcement of the coming of the kingdom, following the presence of the king, was not merely a veiled claim to the title in coming himself, but that of Jesus, but words and suggestions have been made in the investigation, this title, "son of man" is found not to be a new title, nor one of Jesus' own creation. The Testament has made use of it, and the prophet Isaiah used it extensively, revealing that others addressed him as "son of man" Jesus likewise used the title, but his usage was more of a traditional conception,⁴ somewhat in keeping with that ascribed to Jesus by even of the evangelists.⁵ Jesus called himself "the son of man" without hesitation; evidently while the phrase expressed much to him, it was also have meant much to those immediately associated with him, since their expression reveals, that they saw in him "the Christ".

When Jesus had made his baptism on his baptism, he then drew from them both the

popular conception, and their conception of him. When the announcement of Jesus' Messianic character is made by Peter, it does not come from a suggestion of Jesus, but it is the conception drawn from his disciples by his direct question, "whom do men say I am?"

"Peter acting as spokesman for the disciples in replying to Jesus, without question understood him (Jesus) to be 'the Son of Man' in the sense in which Daniel applied it. Observe the antithesis in Peter's reply, 'the Christ'!"¹

"According to Mark, Jesus, after he has received from his disciples the popular estimate, turns to them to ask what they themselves think. Peter quickly makes reply for the group 'Thou art the Christ! It would seem from Jesus' warning to keep silent, that Jesus was dissatisfied with Peter's confession. If he were, it would not be from the words themselves - which were true - but because Peter showed by the tone of his voice, that he was not yet free from the old popular notion of the Messiah!"² Following Luke's account, we notice he expands the reply found in Mark, making it the "Christ of God," or "We say you are God's Messiah." Jesus reproves them, and bade them never say it to anyone in the future; though Jesus did not

1. Carr, "The Cambridge Bible," Vol. on Matt. page 133.

2. Davies, J.N. "Abingdom Bible Commentary," page 1011.

repudiate the title "Messiah" or "Christ," he seems to avoid it as much as possible. "No man had told Peter, including Jesus himself. Only inward divine revelation could have enabled Peter to make the right guess. Human sight and judgment could not discern the Divine Sonship in Jesus as he walked the earth!"¹

"Without question Jesus knew what lay before him, he planned for the future, he secured representative men, and he taught them. The final and crucial question was, if at last they believed in him as the Messiah. If that were once secured, then they could proceed to learn what manner of Messiah he was, and how far he differed from the popular conception of an earthly potentate which they themselves still shared. This narrative in Matthew (16:16) is of course taken from Mark, but there are important additions. To the words of the confession in the source, Peter here adds 'the son of the living God,' and we are probably justified in suspecting that the phrase was read back into his mind by the experience and belief of the early church. The Divine Sonship formed no part of contemporary Messianic belief; and until the day of Pentecost, the disciples were not given to the development of the new idea!"²

1. Montefiore, C.G., "The Synoptic Gospels," Vol. II, p. 234.

2. Robinson, T.H., "The Moffatt New Testament Commentary"

Our concern is not with the conception of "Sonship," or of "a living God," but of the almost uniform belief of the disciples in Jesus as "the Christ" which was evidently that which held them together. This confession surely meant much to the apostles later, and was considered a vital theme in the Primitive Christian Church, or else it would not have been given such a prominent place by Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

Christ now informs his disciples what he must endure; apparently they did not fully understand and were disturbed during the trial and crucifixion, but with the resurrection of their Lord, their faith and hope were reanimated. He now appears to them, a supernatural being clothed in heavenly power; much more in accord with their Jewish conception of a Messiah than the lowly man of Nazareth had been. However, he did not formulate an organization within Judaism to perpetuate his teachings and practices, or bind his followers together. They did not become an independent movement during his ministry; but with the ascension of Christ, this nucleus of believers in him were left without a physical leader. "Nevertheless, they were held together by a mystic tie, a tie superior to a human organization, which was a belief in Jesus as 'the Messiah,' and they themselves as

heirs of the Messianic kingdom which they expected him soon to establish!"¹

"The resurrection served to convince his disciples, not only that Jesus was still living, but that he had now entered on his supreme office as the Messiah. The resurrection was the crowning proof, the palpable guarantee of Jesus' Messiahship according to the apostle Paul, "If Christ is not risen your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins"(I Cor.15:14). According to this the belief that Jesus was the Messiah confirmed by the resurrection formed a central belief around which the Christian Church came into being.

"It was by no means the life of Jesus or his teachings, however unique in grandeur of soul the one, or in loftiness of spirit the other, that created the Christian Church, but rather its followers' vision of his resurrection which gave unity and stability to their belief in him!"²

"The existence and first development of the Christian Church rests on a historical foundation - on the acknowledgment of the fact that Jesus was the Messiah - and not on a certain system of ideas----. Believing that Jesus was the Messiah, they ascribed to him the whole idea of what the Messiah was to be according to the meaning and spirit of the Old Testa-

1.McGiffert, J.N., "The Apostolic Age," page 65.

2.Kohler, K., "Origins of Synagogue & Church," p.232.

ment promises, rightly understood; they acknowledged him as the Redeemer from sin, and the Ruler of the Kingdom of God, to whom their whole lives were to be devoted!"¹

"Jesus did not found the church---. All the consolidating the early community of believers, rests upon the apostles, upon their enthusiasm, their courage and their endurance!"²

"It is a fact of immense importance and significance that Jesus himself created no organization, he left the believers free to follow their own development as the spirit might inspire. Great value thus attaches to the freedom of Christianity from a fixed constitution. The genius of the religion was not fettered, but was left pliable, so that it could freely embody itself in any type of organization which varying conditions might suggest!"³

The period beginning immediately after the ascension of the Messiah, and extending through until the last living voice of his personal apostles became silent among men, with the decease of the Apostle John, a period of some seventy years in which the apostles were the prime movers of the church, will be spoken of as the Apostolic Age. During this period, the

1. Neander, A., "Planting and Training the Church" p.27.
 2. Wernle, P., "Beginnings of Christianity," Vol. I.
 3. Peak, A.S., "Commentary of the Bible"

Christian Church came into existence; therefore, the church of this period will be spoken of as the Primitive Christian Church. Our plan throughout this paper will be to study the organization of the Primitive Christian Church, and not confuse the liberty and the simplicity of the church of the Apostolic Age, with the fixed ecclesiasticism which began to take form immediately afterward.

CHAPTER I

The Literature of the Primitive Christian Church

The Apostolic Age did not open with a new literature developing simultaneously with the Primitive Christian Church. Therefore, the literature bearing upon the organization of the Primitive Christian Church is of a fragmentary nature. During the ministry of Jesus, "He strove to set religion free from the tyranny of the written law, which was very meticulously interpreted by the scribes. He left no written word (revealing a plan for the organization of the church), instead he left living men whom he had inspired by his own life and words, to claim direct access to God as Father, and to trust in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit!"¹ Apparently, directly

1. Fowler, H. T., "The History & Literature of the N.T."

after the ascension of Jesus, and during the formative period of the Primitive Christian Church, these were too intensely occupied with the present and immediate future to spare a glance, or write a record for the information of the more remote ages. ~~Though, Some~~ of these did eventually write, but such literature as we have from them, indicates that they did not write until several decades after the church had come into existence.

Since we do not have an extant literature, developed simultaneously with the development of the church from its beginning, and continuing on through to the close of the Apostolic Age, we are compelled to resort to, and rely on that fragmentary literature which makes an earnest effort to depict the beginning and growth of the Christian Church.

Though Jesus was the inspiration that brought into existence the Christian movement, which soon after his ascension developed into the Christian Church, he did not leave behind him a personal literature like unto the Apostle Paul. However, a very few in number among those who believed in Jesus did write and this was done many decades after the close of his ministry. These were divided by distance and varying local conditions caused differences to exist among the churches, yet they made an earnest ^{effort} to record the teachings of Jesus and depict his great life and

spirit among his followers of their day. In this extant literature,¹ only one writer makes mention of Jesus referring to the church, and he makes Jesus refer to the church as an institution which was to come into existence.²

There are some differences of opinion regarding the authenticity of this passage (Matthew 16:18) since it does not appear in the other Gospels. The general conception is that Matthew has taken the narrative from Mark and inserted a later development of the church, and assigned to it a place of almost supreme authority, and very unlike that assigned to it in the earlier Christian literature. "How far the words of this highly controverted saying as preserved in the First Gospel were actually uttered by Christ, and, if so, with what exact significance, it would be profitless to inquire. The form in which we have it is the version as remembered, repeated, and in repetition doubtless not a little modified, by those who disapproved alike of the undue conservatism of James, and of Paul's too liberal attitude toward the law, but were content to accept the via media of Peter!"³

"It is therefore possible, that Matthew 16:17-19 are, in their present order and connection, **are**

1. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

2. Matt. 16:18, 19; 18:17.

3. Streeter, B.H.; "The Four Gospels" p. 515.

the work of the evangelist compiling detached sayings in honor of the great apostle. While in Matthew 18: 17-19, the Jewish coloring of these sayings is very remarkable; 'binding,' 'loosing,' the literary contrast of 'earth' and 'heaven' were probably all commonplace to Jewish Theology. The single word 'church' alone lies open to suspicion of betraying Christian influence!"¹ "This interpolation appears to glorify Peter and the church, and it was probably inserted about the age of Hadrian (111-138 A.D.) in Rome. The passage without the interpolation belongs to the older traditions!"²

Every indication is that the sections of Matthew's Gospel referring to the church are not the original sayings of Jesus, but are interpolations written when the church had become an organized body, and later than the Apostolic Age. Since this is the only account referring to the church in the Gospels, and does not throw any light on the church and its organization during the Apostolic Age, we are compelled to seek information elsewhere.

Within the Apostolic Age falls such literature as: the epistles written by the recognized Christian leaders to individual Christians, to various Christian Churches, to Christians in general, the

1.Allen,W.C., "International Critical Commentary,"p.178,79.
 2.Montefiore,C.G., "The Synoptic Gospels," Vol.II,p.237,38.

narrative contained in the Acts of the Apostles, and the writings ascribed to those who were contemporaries of Jesus.- Though all of this was written many years after the beginning of the church, some of it reflects the development of the church from its inception, and some reveals its work and organization of that day as seen by the writers. However, there is no doubt, but their unique position has shielded their writings from the ravages, and on the whole they are more satisfactory than those of the following periods.

"The earliest, most direct, and authoratative information of the Christian Church of the Apostolic Age, is that found in the writings of the Apostle Paul, and those which are sometimes ascribed to him. Though he does not in any sense pretend to be a historian; he merely writes letters having something definite in mind which he has a desire to convey, either to a group of Christians or an individual. His references to events are all incidental to his main purpose, but they have a value which always attaches to first-hand testimony. It is becoming a recognized fact, in view of a more exact study of his life and writings, that he owed far more to the Primitive Christian Church, and to those labouring with him, than has usually been granted, and that his relation to it was one of loyalty, obedience, and sympathy. His writings have

been preserved for us, and are our first-hand records of the life of the Apostolic Christian Church, and its organization, since the period which lies behind him, to date, is one of obscurity!"¹

Without question, the very earliest extant Christian literature, dealing with the (then) present-day problems and the organization of the Christian Church from which we can get a conception, comprises the letters written by the Apostle Paul. "In all probability the first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, and known to us as the First Thessalonians, is the earliest preserved writing of Paul, as well as the oldest New Testament epistle. For fifteen years or more the author had been a Christian missionary engaged in vigorous labours in a wide variety of fields!"² Paul's letters were written with a definite purpose in mind for the welfare of the church addressed. Evidently, the spirit with which Paul wrote, and the good judgment displayed in dealing with the various problems which had arisen in the different churches, appealed to the Christians in general. Since, "the unique position assigned by the church to Paul's letters can be traced back to the age preceding Marcion, who drew up and edited collections of the apostle's

1.Scott,E.F., "First Age of Christianity" p.109-112.

2.McCown,C.C., "The Abingdom Bible Cammentary"p.1263.

letters. "The church's collection may have been due to self-defense, but the probability is, that as Marcion's edition of Luke was constructed out of the Church's third Gospel, so his Pauline canon was a similar rechauffe of an existing Pauline collection in the church. Whether this corpus Paulinum can be dated as early as the age of Ignatius (A.D.30-107), or even earlier (as Zahn argues), is a question which can only be asked, in the paucity of the available evidence. It is hardly that the idea of such a collection occurred to Paul, or to anyone during his lifetime, but if the church at Philippi was anxious to possess any extant letters of Ignatius (The epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, ch.XIII), it is reasonable to infer that a similar desire must have already prompted local collections of Paul's letters long before there was any thought of ranking them with the scriptures (II Peter 3:16). This would be rendered possible by the close communications between churches, not only in one district but abroad. What is certain, is that the early Christian literature begins for us with Paul's correspondence!"¹

"It is now recognized that in any attempt to trace the history of the Christian Church of the Apostolic Age, we must first consult the letters

1. Moffatt, Jas., "Introduction of Literature of N.T." p.60.

of the Apostle Paul. He gives us impressions of events, while they are still in the process of hapening; though, by themselves, his letters are fragmentary, and without the light afforded by the Acts of the Apostles we should not be able to estimate their true bearing. Likewise, without the Acts of the Apostles, we would not be able to place the facts, as we know them from Paul's letters, in their right chronological order!"¹ We can hardly overestimate the importance of the Acts of the Apostles. It is our chief authority for the history of the founding of the church, its early growth, and such organization as the author felt was essential to reveal its development. Also, it offers the only extant account of the beginnings of the church. It is a historical work, based in part upon documents, in part upon oral traditions, and largely upon reminiscences of the author,

"The main structural feature of the latter half of the book of Acts, is the presence of four extracts from a diary kept by one of Paul's companions. These extracts (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28), in which the pronoun 'we' is found deserves special notice. The strong case of identifying the diarist with the historian simplifies the problem of authorship. This shows that the author

1. Peake, A.S., "Commentary of the Bible"

was at these time in company with Paul. From Paul's epistles we can draw up a list of his companions during or shortly after the latter period. The epistles of the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon were written during the apostle's first imprisonment in Rome, and from them we learn that there were with him - Epaphroditus, and Epaphras; Timothy, Tychicus, Aristarchus, and Mark; Jesus Justus, Luke, and Demas. The first two joined him after his arrival at Rome and so are excluded from the claim of authorship of the Acts. The next four are excluded by their mention in the Acts, Demas by his subsequent abandonment of the apostle (II Tim. 4:10), and we are left with Jesus Justus and Luke. Paul's last epistle, the second to Timothy, written from Rome just before the close of his life, gives us some further names. Of these some are Roman Christians and recent friends of the apostle (Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia); others have appeared in the Acts (Prisca, Aquila, Erastus, and Trophimus); and we are left with Crescens, Titus, and Luke. Crescens and Jesus Justus may now be eliminated. There is no hint of their having been intimate with Paul, or in his company as early as the second journey (ch. 16). The case is different with Titus. He was most intimately connected with the apostle; he was 'his own child in the faith'; and in the innermost circle of Paul's disciples, Titus shared

the first place with Timothy. There is indeed no direct evidence that he was with Paul during the 'we' periods of the Acts. But he was with the apostle at the council in Jerusalem (Gal.2:1), which was just before the first period; and we are led on to notice the further surprising fact, that this important minister of the apostle is not once mentioned in the Acts at all. A natural inference would be, that he himself was the author of the book; this hypothesis must be rejected in face of the decisive evidence of II Tim.4:10 'Titus is gone to Dalmatia; only Luke is with me! Finding there no rival claimant, we accept the voice of tradition which is unanimous in ascribing the Gospel and Acts to Luke; and the more readily, as there was no other reason why Luke should have been selected!'¹

"The 'we' sections have been ascribed to a number of Paul's companions, but the evidence favors Luke, himself as the eye-witness involved. The work as it stands is anonymous, like the Gospel, but the name of Luke was associated with both from an early date, and with this tradition the mass of vital evidence presented in the studies of Hawkins, Ramsey, and Harnack agrees!"² We are therefore inclined to accept the ancient opinion, and to also accept the

1. Rackham, R.B., "The Acts of the Apostles," p.16.

2. Burch, E.W., "Abingdom Bible Commentary," p.1095.

traditional view of the origin of both the Gospel and the Acts. Not alone does the internal evidence of the New Testament assist us in the establishment of Luke as the author of the Acts of the Apostles, but those Christians who followed immediately after the apostles considered Luke as the author. These quoted many of the rich sayings of the apostles, made use of some of the historical incidents, and referred to it (what is now known to us as the Acts of the Apostles), as an authentic document; though, not always by name, or even the same name when a title is used.

This may be accounted for in the fact, that it was a treatise addressed to an individual, in which case the subject matter is considered as the more important,¹ and from which the manuscript later received its name. "The use of the Acts does not appear so early, or so frequently as is true of the Gospels and Pauline epistles. The reason is obvious; the epistles had a special field, direct from the author to the church or an individual, the Gospels made quite a general appeal to all, and only gradually would the Acts circulate."² Therefore, we are compelled to study the later literature and from this we find literary allusions to the contents of our Acts of the Apostles, reference made to this

1. Acts 1:1, 2.

2. Robertson, A. T., "International Standard Encyclopedia"

document by different names, and the early Christian's conception of its author. Among these we find that Ignatius (A.D.30-107), Justin Martyr (A.D.110-165), and Polycarp (A.D.65-100) used many direct quotations, historical incidents, and explanations of vital themes which are found in the Acts of the Apostles as we now have it, without referring to it as a book, or manuscript by a definite name.

Irenaeus (A.D.120-202) likewise used many long historical quotations which are found in the Acts as we now have it. In practically every case he uses the name of the speaker, and the speaker's quotation; as, "Peter, coming, in, said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of person'(Acts 10:34). He contradicts the current opinion of his day, that Paul was the only apostle who had knowledge of the truth. For this he makes use of the Acts of the Apostles and considers Luke as the author, as briefly summarized in the following; "If, then, any one shall, from the Acts of the Apostles, carefully scrutinize the time concerning which it is written that he went up to Jerusalem on account of the forementioned question, he will find these years mentioned by Paul coinciding with it. Thus the statement of Paul harmonizes with, and is, as it were, identical with, the testimony of Luke regarding the apostles!"¹ Irenaeus goes farther than

1. Irenaeus, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," ch.13:3

v

quoting from, and mentioning the title of the Acts of the Apostles, he evidently considered it on an equal basis with the Gospel of Luke from the following:

"Thus did the apostles simply, and without respect of persons, deliver to all what they had themselves learned from the Lord. Thus also does Luke, without respect of persons, deliver to us what he has learned from them, as he has himself testified saying, 'Even as they delivered them unto us, who were from the beginning eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word' (Acts 20:25). Now if any man set Luke aside, as one who did not know the truth, he will (by so acting) manifestly reject the Gospel of which he claims to be a disciple!"¹

Clement of Rome (A.D.30-100) without question considers the Acts of the Apostles as Scripture since he incorporates a section of Acts (20:35), which is as we now have it, among other passages of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures.² Tertullian (A.D.145-220) evidently was very familiar with, and relied on the authenticity of the Acts of the Apostles also. He refers to it as the Acts of the Apostles,³ writes in defense of it,⁴ and apparently considers it as Scripture

1. Irenaeus, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," ch.14:2,3.

2. Clement, "First Epistle of Clement to Corinthians," ch.2.

3. Tertullian, "Perscription Against Heretices," ch.22.

4. " " " " " " " 23.

on an equal basis with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

Cyprian (A.D.200-258) makes use of a term, "Acts of the Apostles". He uses it freely and as an established and authentic source throughout his writings. The usage of the term evidently is applied to a document, which is considered as an authoratative record of the attitude, teachings, and practices of the apostles after the ascension of Christ, and the part they played in the formation of the Primitive Christian Church. In his defense of the church, from what he considers as heresies, he makes extensive use of the law, prophets, and the teachings of Jesus, and very often seals his climax by saying, "Also in the Acts of the Apostles: 'It seems good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to impose upon you no other burden than those things which are necessary'(Acts 15:28). Another of his characteristic statements is, "We read in the Acts of the Apostles, 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul'(Acts 4:32). Cyprian's quotations from the Acts are practically all preceeded either directly, or indirectly by, "In the Acts of the Apostles". There seems to be no question in relation to the existence of such a document by that name, and as authoratative as the Old Testament, Synoptic Gospels, or Pauline letters.¹

1.Cyprian, "Life and Passion of Cyprian" v.3.

Perhaps the most concise and direct statement of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, on the Acts of the Apostles, and its authorship is that of Pamphilus (A.D.

-309). He has used the term, "Acts of the Apostles" in the writings ascribed to him, "An Exposition on the Chapters of the Acts of the Apostles". In his introduction we read, "Having had ourselves the advantage of the method and model received from our fathers and teachers, we attempt, in a modest way, to give these in this exposition of the chapters-----. We make this exposition therefore, after the history of Luke, the evangelist and historian-----.¹ This outline which the author has left to posterity, gives every indication of being an excellent and authentic outline of the Acts of the Apostles as we now have it.

"The Canon of Muratori attest its repute as Scripture in the Western Church, like Tertullian in the Church of Africa, and Clement in Alexandria. The book was canonized first of all as a supplement to the catholic epistles, --to make up for the fact that many of the apostles had left no writing behind them. --and, in the second place, as a link between the Pauline and the catholic epistles, by way of documentary proof that Paul and the twelve were at one!"²

1. Pamphilus, "An Exposition of Acts of Apostles" (Introd)
 2. Moffatt, Jas.; Introduction to Literature of N.T. p. 314.

With the above mentioned evidence, we are convinced the Acts of the Apostles is unquestionably the most authentic document relative to the beginning and development of the Primitive Christian Church; beginning with its inception near Pentecost 30 A.D.¹, and extending over a period of something like thirty-five or forty years. However, there are differences of opinion relative to the period covered by this historical document; though the best authorities do differ widely, they keep it well within the first century.²

With the Acts of the Apostles depicting the historical development of the church, and the variety of information relative to the churches in general from the epistles of Paul, most of which were written much earlier than the Acts, the remaining first century literature of the New Testament, and such other literature as the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, and etc in so far as they are worthy of consideration, will be used in seeking information relative to the organization of the Primitive Christian Church.

1. Acts of the Apostles 1:15.

2. Rackham, R.B., "The Acts of the Apostles," p.65.

Ramsey, "Paul, the Traveler & Roman Citizen," p.23.

Moffatt, Jas., "Introduction to Literature of N.T.", p.312.

Streeter, B.H., "The Primitive Church," p.12.

CHAPTER II

The Usage of the Term Church in the Apostolic Age

The author of the Acts of the Apostles reflects that the earliest believers in Jesus as the Messiah, were spoken of when assembled as the church.¹ Though, the earliest extant writings of the New Testament revealing this fact are those of Paul. However, the church had been in existence practically two decades when the first mention of it is made in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica.² Evidently, it was the expansion of the church that made the first Christian writings necessary, as a substitute for the living presence of the great apostle. From his writings which we have preserved, we get a conception of these more or less isolated groups having a similar belief in Jesus as the Messiah. During the decade following the writing of the first letters of Paul to the church at Thessalonica, at least ten letters which we can ascribe confidently to Paul have been preserved. In each of these letters he uses the term "church" in practically the same sense throughout. By a chronological study of these letters, if there is any variation detected, it is not in the meaning of the term, but in the recognition of a more complex organization of the church.³ Following the other writers of the New Testament, we find it used by James (2:14), in the third Epistle of John, and also

1. Acts 2:47.

2. I Thess. 1:1.

3. Phil. 1:1.

very freely used and specifically applied by the author of the book of Revelation (1:4f). The author of the First Gospel quotes Jesus as using the term 'church! The sections in which the term "church" is found (Matt. 16:18; 18:17), and the place assigned the church have presented unusual difficulties to scholars, and some widely divergent views are held, both concerning its genuineness and its real meaning. However, every indication is, that the term "church" was neither a new or unknown term at this time, and could have been used by Jesus, and understood by those who listened to him. The author of the Acts of the Apostles could feel perfectly free to apply the term "church" to the early believers in Jesus as the Messiah, when they were assembled (2:47), as the following will reveal it was a known term.

Among the Hebrew people the term church or "Ekklesia" was known and used, having had a long and pre-Christian origin. Practically throughout the history of the Greek world, and well into the Apostolic Age, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles,¹ "ekklesia" was the term used to designate the regular and special assembly of the whole body of citizens in a free city state. The term literally meant, the whole body of citizens called together by the herald for the discussion, or decision of social, political or business matter.

In the Greek of the Septuagint we find they used the word "ekklesia" to translate the Hebrew term "kahal," which in the Old Testament usage is understood to be, the community of Israel assembled for religious worship, as in Joshua (8:35), "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua did not read before the assembly of Israel!"

In the New Testament we find the term "ekklesia" employed in the Old Testament sense by Stephen, where he describes Moses as, "He that was in the church (R.V.congregation) in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). The term therefore comes into the Primitive Christian Church usage with like associations for the Greek and Hebrew. To the Greek it would suggest a self governing democratic society, to the Hebrew a Theocratic society whose members were the subjects of a heavenly king. The pre-Christian usage of the term has a direct bearing upon its Christian meaning; for the "ekklesia" of the New Testament, in its ideals, is a Theocratic democracy, a society of those who are free but are always conscious that their freedom springs from their obedience to their king.¹

The adoption of the term church did not imply the abandonment of the ideas suggested by

1.Lambert, J.C., "International Standard Bible Encycl"
p.651.

the conception of the kingdom. The "kingdom" and the "church" are closely related, yet the two are not to be immediately identified. "The kingdom is a wider conception than the church: it denotes the rule or the supremacy of God in human hearts and human affairs in all man's relationship (family, social, civic, commercial, national, and etc), leaving nothing out. But in keeping with the thought, 'Thy will be done on earth as in heaven'(Matt.6:10). The church on the other hand may be described as the visible expression of the Kingdom on earth in the association of its members for direct religious ends - worship, mutual edification and etc. That it lay in the plan of Jesus to found such a society may surely be inferred from his action in the choice and training of the apostles (Matt.10:2ff); from instructions and commission given to them(Matt.10:1ff), and from the direction to wait for the outpouring of the spirit (Acts 1:4,5)!¹ Yet, we have no record of the plan of Jesus farther than this; he leaves his trained disciples free for the development of the church and the continuation of his work as varying conditions might suggest.

1.Orr, Jas., "History & Literature of Early Church", p.20.

CHAPTER III

The Organization of the Primitive Christian Church

For information relative to the organization of the Primitive Christian Church, we are compelled "to begin with the Book of Acts, not because it was the earliest written, but because it alone records the history of the Christian Body during the two decades following the death of Jesus!"¹ From this we get the conception of the community of believers in Jesus as the Messiah. This depicts them in an upper room in the city of Jerusalem, "may have been the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark which is mentioned in Acts 12:12,"² one hundred and twenty in number, of which the apostles formed the nucleus, and these were all waiting together in prayer.³ This Pre-Pentecostal assembly, waiting in prayer and oneness of spirit gives us the first picture of the church life among the primitive Christians, and goes far into the explanation of the following events; though, we do not meet with the term 'church' until after the historical account of Pentecost, but when we do, it is spoken of as an

1. McCown, "The Promise of His Coming" - .169.

2. Burch, "The Abingdon Bible Commentary" p.1096.

3. Acts 1:12-15.

existing assembly similar to the Pre-Pentecostal assembly. "The oldest manuscripts agree in omitting - 'to the church' - and the literal rendering of the more authoratative text is, ' And the Lord added day by day together such as were in the way of salvation!'"¹

This Pre-Pentacostal Assembly

apparently becomes conscious that Jesus is no longer dead. Peter acting as spokesman, takes council with the larger group, proposes that the apostolic circle, broken by the defection of Judas Iscariot, should be restored (vv.15f). He reviews the treachery of Judas in guiding the foes of Jesus out to Gethsemane that fateful night, and quotes scripture to justify their filling the place left vacant by the death of Judas (vv.16-20). The successor of Judas was chosen from among eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry (vv.22,23). In this first assembly of believers in Jesus as the Messiah, there are no indications of an organization. "Jesus left his believers free, so that the body which they assumed might be created by the spirit which inspired it. Great value thus attaches to the freedom of Christianity from a fixed constitution. The genius of the religion was not fettered, but was left pliable, so that it could freely embody itself in any type of organization which varying conditions

1.Lumby, "The Cambridge Bible," pages 30,31.

might suggest. We cannot assume that in the primitive church the apostles were entrusted with power of government, but they were the natural leaders and inevitably held a position of high moral authority!"¹

"There is as yet little sign of organization, they were all together, their characteristic was cleaving steadfastly to the Lord and to one another in constant prayer (This close adhesion is a regular mark of church life as is indicated in Acts 2:42; 46; 6:4; 8:13). Such prayer included regular attendance at the temple worship, but no doubt the upper chamber was still a center for reunion among themselves!"²

Out of this Pre-Pentecostal Assembly came forth courageous and consecrated spirits ready, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place,"³ but not as an organization outside of the established religion of Judea. Apparently they were exceedingly loyal to their religion and to its special days and feasts. "They no doubt soon after dawn on the morn of Pentecost attended the temple service for the morning sacrifice, and in a body they returned to their upper room, and abstained from eating and drinking, not breaking their fast till fourth hour.

1.Peake, "Commentary of the Bible" p.645.

2.Rackham, "The Acts of the Apostles" p.10.

3.Acts 2:1.

during this period of meditation, 'they were filled with the Holy Spirit'(Acts 2:4), which manifested itself in the body of the one hundred and twenty. Among these a transformation takes place, they become new creatures, all fear of the Jew is gone, its the beginning of the new spiritual life of the church, its second birth!"¹

Peter as spokesman for the apostles, proclaims boldly to the multitude that "these are not drunken as ye supposed"(2:15), and when, therefore, he ascribes it to the Spirit of God, and when he cited the passage from the prophet which was obviously fulfilled before their eyes, they could not but see that he was right. They could see too, that the prediction involved much more than they were then witnessing; for it contemplated an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, not only on the men then before them, but on "all flesh!" "The Christian dispensation comes to fulfil the words of the older apocalyptist, Joel, 'And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy!"²

The work of the church has begun, Peter makes known the exalted Christ (2:36), hearers

1.Rackham,"The Acts of the Apostles," p.15.
 2.McCown,"The Promise of His Coming," p.102.

are impressed by the message and manner of Peter, supported by his fellow witnesses. "Their conviction was so deep that it demanded immediate council from the speaker (2:37). The conditions laid down by Peter seemed to be; first, repentance, then baptism. They must take the right attitude toward Jesus the Messiah and they must identify themselves with this movement----, and about three thousand joined the movement that day!"¹

In this Primitive Christian Church, the spirit of brother-hood predominates, "having all things in common"(2:44), to such an extent that a communistic system is inaugurated (2:46), apparently which was only a temporary measure, and daily there were additions to the church (2:47). Within a few days five thousand men came into the church (4:4), those who had possessions disposed of them and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had needs" (4:35). This appears to be one of the characteristics of the Primitive Christian Church, and was entirely voluntary on the part of those coming into the church. "The writer considers the community of goods as a means to an end, not as a cardinal element in the

1. Rackham, "The Acts of the Apostles," p.15.

growing Christian Church. The emphasis here (vv.32-37) is upon the unanimity, the unselfishness, the brotherly love of its members, and upon the public ministry carried on (v.33, marked as it was by power and grace!"¹

With the church now numbering thousands; yet there are no indications of an organization, or of an officer directing the affairs of this multitude. The apostles appear to be only teachers and counselors, more out of experience than of delegated authority. The absence of an organization may be accounted for in the fact, since they continued in the temple worship, that they had considered themselves Jews in the ideal sense, and not a separate body outside of Judaism, which conception seems to be held by others.

"Their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah did not result in their neglect of the rules and ceremonies of Judaism, nor make them less zealous than before for the religion of their fathers. They continued to discharge their various religious duties that devolved upon them as Jews, including their participation in the temple worship and in the offering of the regular daily sacrifices (Acts 3:1; 10:14; 15:5; 21:21)." ²

1. Burch, "The Abingdom Bible Commentary," p.1100.
 2. McGiffert, "History of Christianity in Apostolic Age," 64.

"To the outside world it (The Primitive Christian Church) appeared simply as the formation of a new sect within Judaism. At a later date it is explicitly called, 'the sect of the Nazarenes' (Acts 24:5; 14; 28:22). There was nothing schismatical in this, since any ten Jews could form a synagogue (6:9), so long as they did not openly conflict with the ordinary life of Judaism. Their chief difference was, they added to the common belief of the Messiah. These were not in any sense a society formed by men for their own edification. From the first they regarded themselves as a supernatural society, formed by an act of God!"¹

Within the Christian community itself, two incidents break the harmony: the first was the attempt of Ananias and Sapphira to pose before the brethren as having devoted their entire property to the cause, when in reality they gave only a portion (5:1-11), which was an offense against the very spirit of the community. The second was the complaint which arose among the Greek speaking Jews, that the widows belonging to their part of the community were being neglected in the daily ministration of supplies (6:1-6). This crisis in the community demanded immediate

1. Bicknell, "A Commentary of the Holy Scriptures?"

attention, the apostles responded readily and called such assistance as they deemed both necessary and capable (6:2-6), while others volunteered to render assistance (5:6,10). Various conceptions have been advanced concerning "the younger men," who apparently assisted of their own volition, and the seven who were chosen to serve. The former will receive our immediate consideration.

"A development of organization seems to be implied in the mention of 'the younger men,' apparently a body of men devoted to such offices as burying. Some such ministers the community must have needed. A slightly different word however is used in verse ten. 'The younger men' was the usual term for adults as distinct from the specifically 'elder men.' Thus the word, if it is to be pressed, may imply the existence of a body of elders or presbyters!"¹

Authorities differ widely as to whether these "younger men" were officials and a part of the beginning of the organization of the Primitive Christian Church, or just "the younger men" among the Christian community and no part of an organization other than that of Judaism.

"Some have suggested that 'the younger men' were persons connected with the church whose

1. Rackham, "The Acts of the Apostles," p. 67.

business it was to take charge of funerals. But it seems likely that, at a time when assistance had not been provided to relieve the apostles from 'serving tables' and distributing funds to those who were needy (6:1-4), there should already have been an organization for this less pressing necessity. The Greek word used here is not the same as in verse ten, and this variation seems to show that 'the younger men' were not in an official position, but were only the most able physically to preform such an office as is here described!"¹ The weight of authority seems to rest with the latter view. Since the Christian community retained their connection with the synagogues (6:9), no need of special organization of their own was felt. In fact, it would have implied a breach with Judaism, which as yet was foreign to their thoughts.

The Selection of the Seven

The complaint of the Hellenist to the apostles suggested the need of some definite arrangement to meet the immediate difficulty within the Christian Community (6:1-6). Two very distinct conceptions are drawn from plans suggested by the

1. Lumby, "The Cambridge Bible," pages 56, 57.

apostles and approved of and entered into by the Christian Community. The first is: The seven selected were officials, known as deacons in the Primitive Christian Church, an organization apparently outside of Judaism. The second is: The seven were selected to render an immediate and vital service in the Primitive Christian Church, with no thought at that time of being an established official. The former view will receive our consideration first.

"Deacons first appear in the sixth chapter of Acts, under the title of 'the seven;' and afterwards repeatedly in Phil.1:1, I Tim.3:2,8, 12. It had, like the presbyterate, a precedent in the Jewish synagogue, which usually employed three officers for the care of the poor (See Lightfoot, Hor.Heb. ad Act., 6:3). The diaconate grew out of a special emergency in the congregation of Jerusalem, in consequence of the complaint of the Hellenist, or Greek Jews, against the Hebrews, or Palestinian Jews, that their widows were neglected!"¹

Our author appears to deduct his conclusion from " a precedent in the Jewish synagogue, which usually employed three officers for the care of the poor;" and from the fact that he finds the term

1.Schaff,P."Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge"
Schaff-Herzog, Vol.I, p.613-615.

"deacon" referred to by Paul in a letter to the church at Philippi at a much later date. From every indication our author is assuming too much; since the duty which is assigned to the seven is quite specific, while no reference is made to the duty of the deacons mentioned in the Philippian letter. Again, the author of First Timothy refers to the moral fitness, as one of the qualifications for the office of deacon and no definite duty is assigned.

A somewhat wider and more liberal view is taken by Neander in relation to the development of the diaconate. From the following we get his conception; "As the apostles declared they were averse from being distracted in their purely spiritual development of prayer and preaching the word by the distribution of money, we may reasonably infer that even before this time, they had not engaged in such business, but had transferred it to other persons appointed for the purpose. Still earlier in Acts(5:6,10), we find mention of persons under the title of 'young men,' who consider such an employment as carrying a corpse out of the Christian Assembly for burial as belonging to their office, so that they seem to have been no other than deacons. And as the title of 'young' stands in

contrast with that of elders in the church, the existence of servants of the church (deacons), and of ruling elders, seems here to be equally pointed out!"¹

Rackham is somewhat in accord with the latter, of the above conceptions. He thinks "A development of organization seems to be implied in the mention of the 'young men,' apparently a body of men devoted to such offices as burying. Some such ministers the community must have needed. A slightly different word however is used in verse ten, and 'younger men' was the usual term for adults as distinct from the specifically 'elder men' (as in Luke 22:26; I Peter 5:1,5; I Tim.5:1; Tit.2:2,6)."²

Our author seems to be seeking an early organization of the church when the account (Acts 5:1-11) does not imply such a thing. It seems unlikely that, at a time when assistance had not been provided to relieve the apostles from "serving tables" and distributing funds to those who needed (6:1-4), there should have been an organization for this less pressing need. "The Greek word here is not the same as in verse ten, and this variation seems to show that the 'young men' were not in an official position, but were only

1.Neander,"Planting & Training of the Church,"p.72.

2.Rackham,"The Acts of the Apostles," p.67.

the most able physically to preform such an office as is here described!"¹

The selection of the "seven" has given rise to many conceptions, as to their place in the Christian Church at that time. The conviction held by Carlyle is that, "The Christian Church in Jerusalem recognized the paramount obligation of the maintainance of the poor brethren, and it is worthy of notice that the first officers of the Christian community of whose appointment we have direct mention, are the seven who were appointed to carry out the ministration of the church to the poor widows of the community!"² This is in keeping with the Biblical account, he does not try to find a precedent in Judaism, or a title for "the seven" from an office existing in the church at a much later date.

Rackham differs somewhat in this, since he seeks for a precedence in Judaism in the following manner: "The Jews had a fund for the relief of the widows and orphans (II Macc.111.10), and the church could not but provide for her own. The widows formed a recognized body in the church. Precedent for this was to be found in the appointment of the seventy elders by Moses (Num.11:16,25), and of the seventy by the Lord (Luke 10:1). It was a short-coming in the church,

1.Lumby, "The Cambridge Bible," p.57.

2.Carlyle, "Hasting's Dictionary of Apostolic Church," Vol.I.

which however was overruled for good, and given occasion for a picture of the first apostolic ordination. In the Old Testament, ordination was accompanied with the laying on of hands, the usual form of blessing, as when Moses appointed Joshua to be his successor.¹ This was also practiced by Jews,² and now by the apostles of Jesus.³ But in the Christian Church the power and authority by which ministry is exercised, is that of the Holy Spirit, then, is conveyed by the laying on of the apostles' hands. For as yet the apostles, being the sole officers were the only possessors of the charisma necessary for ruling, and only by their hands could it be conveyed to others (cp.8:14-16). Another question arises, to what office were they ordained? The almost universal tradition of the church, going back at least as far as Irenaeus, he sees in them the first deacons. Though, were 'the seven' deacons? It is in reality too early in the history of the church, to put the question in such a direct shape, and so far as a definite answer can be given, we should be inclined to say, that they certainly were not deacons in the subsequent technical sense. They were never called deacons in the Acts, their official title is 'the seven,' appointed 'over this business,' to superintend and bear the responsibility in the place of the apostles!"⁴

1.Num.28:23.

2.Mark 10:16.

3.Acts 6:6.

4.Rackham, "The Acts of the Apostles," p.81-84.

Regardless of whether the appointment of "the seven" grew out of a precedent in Judaism, or sprang out of an immediate need as stated in (Acts 6:1-6), we find here the first indication of a movement tending toward organization for conservation, harmony, and extension; but the term deacon is not applied to "the seven" in the Book of Acts. Nevertheless, by the later church traditions they are constantly regarded as the earliest deacons, and Irenaeus specifically states that Stephen was a deacon in the following, "And still further, Stephen, who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles, and who, of all men, was the first to follow the footsteps of the martyrdom of the Lord, being the first that was slain for confessing Christ!"¹ So strong was this feeling that "the seven" were the first deacons, that in some churches the number of deacons were limited to seven.² Regardless of the later developments, the institution of which was a purely spontaneous development, brought into existence because there was an immediate and vital need which was wholly new. However, there are no indications that this movement tending toward an organization was to be something permanent; probably this was a temporary organization, scattered

1. Irenaeus, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," Bk. 3, ch. 12, v. 10.

2. Robertson, "Encyclopaedia Biblica," Vol. I, p. 1039.

by the persecution which was fatal to Stephen, and never re-established since we find no mention made of it later on.

A similar conception is held by Bicknell. He thinks "The appointment of 'the seven' (Acts 6:1-6) was an emergency measure. There was not any idea of founding a ministry that should last throughout the ages---. The initiative lies with the apostles (v.2). The action is that of the whole church in the power of the Spirit---. In the church, as in any organization, the putting forth of a new organ to meet a new need is a sign of vitality. The title deacon is never used, though the very form from which the name deacon is derived is employed. We must not expect at this time and under these conditions to find definite titles for specialized officials!"¹

Hill sees in this Messianic community only a temporary arrangement. "The two dominant features of the church life at this time, were a constant recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and an eager expectation of the coming of Christ. These combined created a religious enthusiasm, a consciousness of Divine guidance, and a subordination of temporal matters, which account for the deep spiritual life and

1.Bicknell, "A New Commentary on the Holy Scriptures," 341.

thought of the Christians. These caused an indifference to outward forms, fixed rules, and human authority!"¹ Of their organization we have so far had little trace, only what would apply to a temporal matter. We have no evidence that the Christian Community differed much from Judaism in general at this time, such as would mark them out as a formal church of believers in Jesus as the Messiah, from their fellow-countrymen. Though, by the method of this Christian Community, in selecting men (as in Acts 6:1-6) during a crisis, we find an example of how regular church officers might have been created at a later date.

Evidently much has been assumed in trying to identify "the seven" with either the office, or the title of "deacon" which is found in the church at a much later date. There are no indications that "the seven" can be identified with the office and function of deacon for the following reasons: they are not called deacons by Luke; they are not referred to as such by any of the New Testament writers; and there are no indications that there were ever deacons in the church in Jerusalem.

It is to be noticed also, that the duties assigned to "the seven" were not permanent,

1. Hill, "The Apostolic Age," p.350.

neither were they identical with the functions discharged by the deacons of whom we read in (Phil.1:1; I Tim.3:2,8,12,13) the latter part of the first century, The former were put in charge of almsgiving at the first, and some of these (Acts 6:7-7:60; 8:5-40) soon became evangelists outside of the church confined to Jerusalem; while the latter, as early as we are able to secure data, acted simply as bishop's assistants.¹

Since nothing more is mentioned of the remaining five, of the original committee of seven serving in this capacity (Acts 6:3), our conception is that the seven were nothing more than a temporary committee, served only a temporary purpose, and can not be considered as deacons or officials in the Primitive Christian Church.²

Officers of the Primitive Christian Church

While the Primitive Christian Church is confined to Jerusalem and its immediate surrounding, there is no mention made by Luke of officials other

-
1. "Constitution of the Holy Apostles"
(Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol.VII, p.410).
 2. a. McGiffert, "The Apostolic Age" p.77-79.
b. Streeter, "The Primitive Church" p.77-78.
c. Allen, "The Christian Constitution" p.26.
d. Scott, "The Beginning of the Church" p.144,145.

than the apostles who have been the prime movers in the church since its inception, and but few indications of an organization implied. However, following the persecution which began with the preaching of Stephen (Acts 6:9), which caused all of the disciples, with the exceptions of the apostles, to be driven from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), and later when these persecuted and scattered disciples are eventually settled as groups in various places outside of Jerusalem, and their relationship is reestablished with the church in the city of Jerusalem, then we get some conception of the organization of the Primitive Christian Church.

From the Book of Acts (11:19-24) we learn that Barnabas is sent by the Primitive Church in Jerusalem, to visit the outlying groups of disciples as far away from Jerusalem as Antioch. Later prophets come to Antioch from Jerusalem, one of them by the name of Agabus predicts a great famine which will spread over the whole world, his prediction is accepted and the disciples without exception make contributions in proportion to their means, and sent it to the elders in Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul. Therefore, from this we learn, as early as this there are in the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem, apostles, prophets, and elders. Barnabas seems to hold an important place,

but no title is given as in the case of Agabus.¹

There are no definite indications that Barnabas is an official. He merely acts in the capacity of a delegate for the elder church, as it manifests a brotherly feeling and a conciliatory spirit toward the younger church in Antioch!² Apparently he is chosen for his qualifications. "He is a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and would most likely be well known to the Cyprians who were preaching at Antioch!"³ He had aligned himself early with those who believing in Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 4:36,37), and his long experience with the apostles and the early church in Jerusalem, would make him the logical disciple for this mission. Since he was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles, which literally means 'son of exhortation; a Hebraism for one noted as an exhorter. The name was given to him on account of his superiority in hortatory addresses. This is a power much rarer among public speakers than logical or didactic force, and it has been highly prized throughout all the history of the church!"⁴ In describing the work of Barnabas in Acts 11:23, the verb used, 'exhorted' is that from which the noun in this very is derived, and is akin to the term 'Paraclete; which is

1.Acts 11:27,28.

2.Rackham,"The Acts of the Apostles" p.168.

3.a.Lumby,"The Acts of the Apostles" p.146.

b.Rackham,"The Acts of the Apostles" p.168.

4.McGarvey,"New Commentary on Acts" p.82.

so often translated 'Comforter' when applied to the Holy Spirit, but rendered 'advocate' in I John 2:1 when used in the intercession of Jesus.¹ "Luke is our best authority, and he interprets Barnabas as 'son of paraclesis! Paraclesis was a spiritual gift, closely akin to, but distinct from prophecy and teaching. Its meaning is shewn by the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the paraclete. A paraclete is one whom we 'call to our side' to help us by its advocacy or otherwise. And so paraclesis denotes the Spiritual help which Christians render to one another. At one time it may take the form of exhortation, at another of comfort or consolation. The best equivalent, which will cover both elements, is encouragement. In this power of help, Barnabas excelled, and we find him exercising it at Antioch together with the kindred gifts of prophecy and teaching (Acts 11:23-26),² and at a later date Luke does specifically place the name of Barnabas at the head of a list of five who are known as prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). It is simpler to consider them as one body of rulers, who both prophesied and taught - they were the rabbis of the Christian Community.

1.Lumby, "The Acts of the Apostles" p.52.

2.Rackham, "The Acts of the Apostles" p.63,64.

Apostles in the Church in Jerusalem

The first of the above mentioned, which might be considered as officials in the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem, is that of the apostle, though these give way as time passes. Luke reveals the fact that Jesus himself bestowed this title upon the twelve (Luke 6:13), every indication is that the term apostle is entirely new, it is similar in meaning to angel, and is found only once in the Greek Old Testament (I Kings 14:6). The original qualification of an apostle seems to have been, that he should have seen the Lord, and have been his witness (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). This was also one of the qualifications mentioned by Peter, when the place made vacant by Judas was filled (Acts 1:21).¹ It is probable that Barnabas, James the Lord's brother, and many others among the disciples were qualified in as far as they were witnesses to the resurrection (I Cor. 15:5-7). Peter mentions a former qualification for the office of apostle as a prerequisite to the witness of the resurrection. The one to be chosen is "from among men who have been with us all the time that Jesus, our Master, went in and out among us - from his baptism

1. Maclean, "Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics"
Vol. VIII, p. 659.

by John down to that day on which he was taken from u - so one must be found to join us as a witness of his resurrection (Acts 1:21). "Such an essential qualification, extending over a period of years and also requiring endurance and persecution, would very naturally make the number from whom choice could be made, a very small one!"¹ No direct mention is made of others being apostles while the original eleven apostles and Matthias remain in Jerusalem. There is an ancient tradition according to Clement of Alexandria, to the effect that "after twelve years (they were to) go out into the world, lest any should say, 'we have not heard!'"² This lacks support, but the fact of the disciples remaining for twelve years in Jerusalem can hardly have been invented, and is in keeping with the conception of our best authorities.³

These drastic qualifications for the office of apostle are modified soon after the apostles leave Jerusalem. Irenaeus in his writings against heresis, says "After the twelve apostles, our Lord is found to have sent seventy others before him"⁴ implying that the seventy were apostles also.

1. Lumby, "The Cambridge Bible," p.13.

2. Clement of Alexandria, "Ante-Nicene Fathers" Vol. II.

3. a. Harnack, "Expansion of Christianity," Vol. I, p.49.

b. Bicknell, "A Commentary of the Holy Scriptures," 300.

4. Irenaeus, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," Vol. I, p.329.

Likewise, Tertullian when writing of Jesus and his apostles says, "He chose also seventy other missionaries (apostles) besides the twelve!"¹ Our concern is not with this later development, under Paul and the sub-apostolic writers, but the qualifications and function of the apostles before they go out from the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem.

After the ascension of Jesus they assume the responsibility at the first assembly of believers in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15,16), the explanation of the behavior of their brethren on Pentecost (2:14f), the revealing of Jesus as Messiah to the multitude of Jewish faith assembled in Jerusalem (2:22), and the instruction of those who had accepted Jesus (2:42). "Their office at this time included implicitly all of the offices which have evolved out of their work, and are now considered as officers in the church. By degrees their various duties have been communicated to others, with the exception of one gift, which has been reserved as the special 'differentia' of apostolic authority: which was through the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit was given!"² With the death of

1. Tertullian, "Tertullian Against Marcion," ch.24.

2. Rackham, "The Acts of the Apostles," p.91.

James, the brother of John (12:2), the apostles retire from the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem, and "James, apparently becomes the head of the church (Acts 12:17)"¹ He is later described as presiding over the council in Jerusalem (15:13), receiving the report of Paul (21:18), and later recognized as one of the pillars of the church (Gal.2:9); thus he seems to have been the head of the church, and it was natural that Peter, from every indication the only apostle remaining in Jerusalem, should send to him the first information of his deliverance before taking leave, closing the work and the period of the apostles in the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem.

Prophets in the Church in Jerusalem

That there should be prophets in the church in Jerusalem was but the fulfillment of prophecy of Joel, which Peter quoted in his Pentecostal sermon (2:17). Again a similar conception is brought out in Peter's course of instructions to Cornelius (10:43). However, this may have a wider meaning, and include the prophets who are in the primitive church and mentioned

¹ Bicknell, "A New Commentary of Holy Scriptures," p.351.

later (11:27). Peter's probable purpose was not to indicate a primary reliance on the prophets (of his day), but to show that instead of being a new promise coming from Jesus alone, it was an old one taught generally in the Old Testament!¹ The former quotation of Peter implies that the office of prophet, with its corresponding duties was carried over from Judaism, and that "the New Testament conception of a prophet is precisely that of the Old Testament,"² though nothing is mentioned of their duties and achievements, prior to the coming of prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch (11:27), but at a much later date, when the Christian movement has gone beyond the confines of Jerusalem, the prophets rank next to the apostles, and are regarded with them as the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph.2:20). The earliest conceptions we are able to get of the prophets of the primitive church, are those made mention of outside of Jerusalem, as at Antioch (Acts 11:27,28). It is without question the "early believers actually did appropriate to themselves the form and well knit frame of Judaism, developed at first out of the synagogues with their proselytes and adherents,"³

1.McGarvey, "New Commentary of Acts," p.213.

2.Purves, "The Apostolic Age," p.105.

3.Harnack, "The Expansion of Christianity," vol.1.

and thus the office and function of prophet, and likewise that of elder, early and naturally have become a part of the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem.

Elders in the Church in Jerusalem

Immediately following the mention of prophets coming from Jerusalem to Antioch to reveal a coming famine, Luke implies that the disciples in Antioch readily believed in the prediction of Agabus, one of the prophets to such an extent that they sent such as they were able, to "the elders" in Jerusalem (11:30). This is the first mention of the term "elder" in the history of the Christian church.¹ Luke makes mention of "the brethren which dwell in Judea," but his specifically stating that they "sent it to the elders" (11:30b) implies, not alone that they were a part of the membership of the church, but reliable members, and perhaps recognized officials capable of making a just distribution of supplies among the brethren. "There is no record of their appointment, or explanation of their office at this time, though it is implied they are a

1. a. Bicknell, "The Abingdon Bible Commentary," p. 350.
 b. DuBuisson, "A New Commentary of Holy Scriptures," 550.
 c. Clark, "Clark's Peoples' Commentary," p. 186.

normal part of the church in Jerusalem!"¹ The term "elder" has a pre-Christian origin. "In primitive times age was a necessary condition of authority, not only among the ancient Jews, but also among the nations of antiquity, the elders of the nation, or the clan constituted the official class!"² With some variations, the institution of elders existed among the Egyptians (Gen.50:7), "pagan priests were called 'elders' in Egypt!"³ The Midianites had their elders (Num.22:7), "The Talmud points to the institution of elders in the time of Abraham (Yoma 28b)"⁴ Moses is commanded to assemble the elders of the people (Ex.3:16,18). "Inscriptions prove that the title of elder was used for certain officials in Greek-speaking countries in pre-Christian times!"⁵ "The term elder has an extensive use, as an official title, among the Hebrews and surrounding nations. It applies to offices, religious and otherwise. From I Macc.12:6; 14:20) it is clear that the Gerousia of the nation, and the elders of Israel were almost identical. The elders of Israel may have been in early times, the lineal decendants of the patriarchs (Ex.12:21)"⁶

1.DuEuisson, "A New Commentary of Holy Scriptures"550.

2.Greenstone, "The Jewish Encyclopaedia," p.92.

3.Deissmann, "Bible Studies"(Eng.Tran.),p.233.

4.Greenstone, "The Jewish Encyclopaedia,"p.92.

5.Deissmann, "Bible Studies," p.230.

6.Singer, "The Jewish Encyclopaedia,"(Art.on elders).

However, one thing seems to be certain, "they occupied an important position in the communal, as well as in the political affairs of the Jewish people. What there was of a permanent authority, lay in the hands of the elders?"¹

The term and office of elder, has not only a pre-Christian origin, but Luke makes mention of a present day usage of the term (4:5,23), and continues to use it (23:14) after the term is applied to some members of the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem (11:30). Our immediate concern is not with the term and office of the Jewish elder, but when and how was the term applied to the elders in the church in Jerusalem? And were these elders officers and a part of the organization at this time?

Various conceptions are held regarding the status of "the elders in Jerusalem"(11:30), such as "This statement 'the elders in Jerusalem' implies that the disciples of the capitol were organized into a religious society, and perhaps into several, modelled after the synagogue. When we find the disciples organized under elders, the origin and character of the arrangement is evident. There were

1.Greenstone, "The Jewish Encyclopaedia," Vol.V,p.92.

doubtless many places of meeting, and there was one body of elders ruling over all (11:30; 15:6)!¹ "The original diaconate of the tables, as contrasted with the ministry of the word, which the apostles reserved to themselves, may then have expanded into this twofold order, - the elders, who preside and have the function of oversight, and the deacons, who help them in the fulfillment of their office. The expansion of the 'helps' into elders and deacons was then a simpler and more natural process (I Cor.12:28)!² Quite a different view is given in the following: "Now a Jewish synagogue normally had a board of Presbyters, who formed a kind of board or committee of management. In the Christian 'synagogue' at Jerusalem this board was already in existence by about A.D.46; for we note that the 'presbyters' are specified (11:30) as the persons to whom the delegates from Antioch handed over the funds collected for famine relief after the prophecy of Agabus; but the situation in Jerusalem was unique, and we can not even safely deduce that in the Gentile churches the primitive form of government ever roughly corresponded to a hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, and deacons!"³

1.Purves,"The Apostolic Age," pp.94,95.

2.a.Allen,"Christian Institutions," p.51.

b.Neander,"Planting & Training of the Church",p.34.

3.Streeter,"The Primitive Church," pp.77,78.

"I am not convinced that the elders mentioned in various passages in the Book of Acts were not officers in any sense, and consequently are not to be connected with the 'seven' in any way. Luke himself possibly thought of the men whom he called elders, as he did of the apostles, as regular officials of the church in Jerusalem, but the fact hardly bears out the opinion, for in Acts 15:23, although he speaks in the previous verse of the 'apostles' and elders' in such a way as to leave the impression that he regarded them as officers, the decree itself which he quotes, and the early date of which can not be denied, has only 'apostles and elder brethren,' showing clearly their unofficial character, and throwing light back upon all those passages in which the term 'elder' occurs!"¹

Our conception is, that nothing definite can be said, as to the time or reason for some of the disciples in Jerusalem being referred to as "the elders" (Acts 11:30). Neither is there an account of their selection, ordination, or an explanation of their office at this time; however, at a later date it is implied that elders are a distinct group, holding a position other than as an ordinary disciple, and recognized as having a voice with the apostles,

1. McGiffert, "The Apostolic Age," p. 74.

and without question they appear to be a normal part of the church (Acts 15:2,4,6,22).

At a much later date than this (11:30), we find an account of the ordination of elders by Paul in the Gentile Churches (Acts 14:23), and perhaps we are meant to understand, though we can only suppose or assume that the ordination of elders by Paul, followed the custom in the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem, and its elders were selected and ordained as were "the seven" (Acts 6:3-6).

However, since nothing specific can be attached to this, we can only say, there were apostles, prophets, and elders in the Primitive Christian Church in Jerusalem. The characteristics which mark the birth of Christianity was the outpouring of the Spirit, and that which sustained it was the expectation of the immediate return of the Messiah. Their being much concerned about the latter, it was some time before the spiritual gifts were fully recognized as filling a definite purpose in the organization of a permanent ministry of the church. Therefore, the organization of the church at this time is without somewhat fluid, and for something more specific its later development must be studied.

CHAPTER IV

The Organization of the Primitive Christian Church
(Beginning at Antioch)

From the dispersion to the centralization and later organization of the disciples of Jesus the Messiah, many circumstances favored, and even hastened their forming of an organization for advancement. The chief influence which apparently awaited those of the dispersion, was that of Judaism. When the disciples were driven from Jerusalem "the synagogues formed the most important opportunity for the rise and growth of the church. The network of Jewish synagogues furnished the Christian propaganda with centers and courses for its development, and the opportunity for the development of a local organization¹ Perhaps no religion ever facilitated another, as did Christianity that of Judaism. One might venture to claim the Primitive Christian Church as an actual continuation of Jewish propaganda,² similar to a prophetic revival within Judaism. Likewise, the Mystery Religions facilitated the centralization and hastened the organization of the church. "It brought

1. Harnack, "The Expansion of Christianity," Vol. I, p. 1.

2. Harnack, "The Expansion of Christianity," Vol. II, p. 47

men together in their religious associations, which were the harbingers of the house-churches of Primitive Christianity, and had ready to hand over to the new religion of Christianity, an organization and system of administration!"¹ While some of their organization was advantageous and perhaps made use of by the Primitive Church, some of it would likely bring about a limited amount of confusion. "These associations were presided over by an official and consecrated priesthood, clad in majestic garb, and vested with authority in things spiritual, which no layman, whatever his rank or worldly status was, he could not challenge. This appealed to the popular imagination!"² "The members who were standing in close spiritual relationship to its head, was almost inevitably bound to affect the organization of the new religion of Christianity. It is interesting to find the danger already serious in the Apostolic Age. This type of fraternity was clearly the model which was followed by the Corinthians, who thereby, as Paul clearly perceived, at once threatened the unity of Christianity, and imperiled the unrivalled authority of its founder!"³

The relationship and contribution of

1. Angus, "Mystery Religions and Christianity," p. 276.

2. Halliday, "Pagan Background of Early Christianity" 238

3. Halliday, "Pagan Background of Early Christianity" 250

the Mystery Religions and Judaism will receive our attention as we study the organization of the Primitive Christian Church of this period. It will be necessary for us to begin with Antioch where first of all, Christian preachers turned to the Gentile world (Acts 11:20), where the assembly is spoken of as a church, where the name Christian had its origin, the place from which Paul and Barnabas start on their first and also second missionary journeys, and to which they report on their return (Acts 14:26; 18:22).¹ For something specific on the organization of the church, we shall study the literature which developed simultaneously with the church, or rather from the development of the church during this period, from Antioch and ending prior to the writing of the Pastoral Epistles (following the chronology of Moffatt)²; for the reflections of its organization.

In the cosmopolitan, cultural, and the religious centers, and elsewhere, we find many groups of Christians which we shall refer to as Primitive Christian Churches. The earliest and most outstanding one referred to outside of Jerusalem is

1. Streeter, "The Primitive Church," p. 78.

2. Moffatt, "Introduction to Literature of N.T.", p. 9, 10.

Antioch. This was for some years the most important Gentile Christianity community of which we have any knowledge.¹ Luke in his account of the development of this Gentile church, traces all of the initiative and power of the movement to Antioch rather than to Jerusalem, leaving the impression it is an institution which is making Christianity a world religion.

Prior to the mentioning of prophets and teachers in the church (13:1), its constituency was referred to as "the disciples"(11:26b, 29a), no distinctions are made, though Barnabas and Saul for "a whole year----taught much people"(11:26) in Antioch, they were not referred to as teachers. However, since their return from Jerusalem, they are mentioned among others as "prophets and teachers (13:1). Luke refers to five disciples in the church in Antioch, as consisting of two distinct classes; some were known as "prophets" and others as "teachers;" and they ministered to the Lord (13:2). Many conceptions are held as to their ministering in the church at Antioch, such as, "They as a body presided over the worship service of the church!"² "Their fasting, prayer, laying on of hands, and religious exercises are bound

1.McGiffert,"The Apostolic Age" p.111.

2.Rackham,"The Acts of the Apostles" p.189.

up in the phrase, 'they ministered to the Lord!'¹ The word is the one usually employed by the LXX for the ministerial service in the temple, as it is also used in Hebrews 10:11, but the parallelism with the next verse, where the services here mentioned is described as 'fasting and prayer' (13:3), shows us that we are not to attach the former strict signification to it, though such has been the mind of the church. From this verb comes our term 'liturgy! Here the old order is giving away to the new, and the terminology is receiving a new sense.² At this time there is no definite account of how "they ministered," we can only assume that each served in his own capacity.

The command of the Holy Spirit, "to separate me Barnabas and Saul," must have been addressed to the other three brethren. The clause, "the work whereunto I have called them"(13:2), implies they had both been called to their work before this time. Paul's call is recorded at a later date (26:16-18), but nothing is mentioned of that of Barnabas. After the fasting and laying on of hands "they sent them away"(13:3). "This did not make Barnabas and

1.Burch, "The Abingdon Bible Commentary," p.1109

2.Lumby, "The Cambridge Bible," p.156 (Vol.on Acts).

Saul apostles of Christ in the technical sense (Acts 1:21), or otherwise (Gal.1:1), but their being "sent away" was both a divine vocation and an interprise of the Antiochan Church?"¹ Luke applies the term "apostle" to Barnabas and Saul (14:4,14) in a rather wide sense, similar to that claimed by Paul during a later period (Gal.1:1). "Paul claims to be one who is divinely commissioned to preach the Gospel of Christ and authorized to plant Christianity. The apostleship as conceived by him involved the idea of the church oecumenical, Christianity as an organic whole, not simply isolated centres of effort, and of divine appointment in relation to it!"² However, our chief aim and concern is, the place the apostles occupied in the Primitive Christian Church. "They preached" (14:21), "they ordained elders in every church"(14:23), they did both teaching and preaching with others (15:35), counseled with "the apostles and elders in Jerusalem"(15:6). Every indication is that their duties were not confined to any specific work this early in the formation of the church.

"Elders were appointed in every church"(14:23), implies another class within the

1.Purves,"The Apostolic Age" p.112.

2.Burton,"International Critical Commentary",p.2

membership of the churches. Here we have a typical account of Paul's regular method of ordaining elders in the churches which he has founded. We can only infer he finds his precedence for this in the church in Jerusalem. Luke evidently has given the title "elder" to those ordained by Paul, a much later term read back into the age in which Paul was ordaining. "In the absence of trustworthy information about the office of 'elder' at this time, it may be supposed that the term represents no standardized church official!"¹ Every indication is that these men were chosen because of maturity, judgment, and care for the growth of those infant churches. "It is very difficult to suppose that Paul gave those (14:21) churches a fixed and definite organization, and appointed regular officers. There is no hint of the existence of church officers in his letter to the Galatian churches (Gal.1:2). It is not improbable, however, that he recognized the peculiar respect and honor in which some of the disciples were held by their companions, --their zeal for the spread of the Gospel,--and their interest in the church to such a degree, that he exhorted the disciples to follow the guidance of such Christians. More than this can

1.Burch, "The Abingdon Bible Commentary," p.1112.

hardly be supposed at this time!"¹ Paul does not use the term "elder," instead he refers to their duties as in Acts 20:28. They are to exercise a spiritual control, and is verified more fully in his letter at a much later date to the Christians at Corinth (I Cor. 16:15,16). "There is no sign that the term 'elder' in Acts 20:17 means anything more than elder brethren, and 20:28 speaks of them as appointed 'overseers' by the 'Holy Spirit,' which makes rather against them for their official character!"²

The "prophet" receives special mention for his activities within the Primitive church in Jerusalem, Antioch, and as a co-labourer with Paul (15:40) on his missionary journeys. Others among the members of the Primitive Christian Church are referred to as, "the evangelists"(Acts 21:8), "a minister"(Acts 26:16), and "bishops and deacons"(Phil. 1:1). The terms "bishops and deacons" appear in what is perhaps the latest literature of this period. This statement, "bishops and deacons" seems to imply that there were two classes of ecclesiastical officials in the church at Philippi. There are no references to earlier officials bearing these titles.

1.McGiffert,"The Apostolic Age," p.191.
 2.McGiffert,"The Apostolic Age," p.288.

The Corinthians, to be sure, are directed to be in subjection to those who, like the household of Stephanas, serve and labour for the good of the saints (I Cor.1_;15); but there is no hint that such persons had been appointed to any office, or been entrusted with any special work. However, at a much later date regularly appointed 'bishops and deacons' are mentioned in the churches in Rome and Corinth.¹ The custom of appointing such officials, was without question a very common practice, but there are no indications that it was a universal practice within the church.²

Many conceptions have arisen over Paul's use of the terms, "bishops and deacons." Baur of Tubingen thinks 'the mention of bishops and deacons is an anachronism in this letter', Haupt, suggests that the two words stand for the same persons - those who had the oversight of the arrangements in collecting and sending the gifts to Paul which this letter speaks of. These are extremes, the fact that bishops is plural shows that there was more than one bishop holding this position in the community. 'Bishops' were practically the equivalent to 'presbyters' or 'elders' in the earlier days of the church; both terms were

1. Clement, "Epistle of Clement to Corinthians," chs. 42, 44.
 2. "The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles," ch. 15.

applied to those who because of their long standing as Christians were looked up to as grave and reverend seniors. As for the deacons, at this time the term is plastic and indefinite, implying little of their later signification!"¹

The question of the place or rank of each of these; that is the "apostle;" "prophet;" "elder;" "bishop;" "deacon;" "evangelist;" "minister;" and others had apparently been raised in the church during this period, and which called for an explanation. Paul, the leading character of the Primitive Christian Churches, undertakes to reveal the place of each of these in their relation to the church. "Out of the consciousness that he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit (with him), grew the mystical doctrine of the church as the universal body of Christ!"² This conception is not new however, "Socrates pointed out how monstrous it would be if hands and feet, which God made to work in harmony, were to thwart and impede one another!"³ Hence, the profound conception of the head and members as together making up the complete body of Christ; that is, those who identify themselves with Christ form his body (the church).

"The body is not one member, but many"(I Cor.12:14). As in the physical body, the body

1.Robertson,"The Abingdon Bible Commentary",p.1239.

2.Peake,"Commentary of the Bible"

3.Plummer,"International Critical Commentary"(Cor).

of Christians at Corinth and elsewhere must have organic unity with its diversity of functions. "God has appointed various members in the church to exercise various functions (I Cor.12:8-10; Rom.12:6-8), and no one of these functions is exercised by all, they are distributed among the members!"¹ The conception is that, those placed in the church (I Cor.12:28) are perhaps listed in order of dignity, yet each was essential for the wellbeing and advancement of the whole.

"The apostles, the organizers of the church are mentioned first; they had administrative functions, but no local jurisdiction, they belonged to the whole church!"² Secondly prophets, "Who on just ordinary occasions was on a level with men, but at special times was a vehicle for direct communication with God!"³ Thirdly teachers, Here the classification according to rank ends, and we approach the particular gifts or functions. "No special appointment by the church was needed for these. Any one who had a gift was at liberty to use it. That of administration (the word *kebernesis*) properly referred to the steering of a ship, and it means here to guide the church in its business affairs!"⁴

1.Peake,"Commentary of the Bible"

2.Lias,"The Cambridge Bible" Vol.on I Cor.).

3.Streeter,"The Four Gospels," p.367.

4.Peake,"Commentary of the Bible"

Within the Christian church of this period, some of its members are referred to as apostles, prophets, teachers, bishops, elders, deacons, administrators, and etc. These with the members not having a title form the body of Christians, known as the church. There are no indications that rank of authority exists among these referred to by title, as in a later age;¹ or that they, at this time, are superior to those not having a title. They apparently have no superior place in the church, only when their spiritual gift is called into service for the welfare of the church as was Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:26) at Antioch, or even as an assistant to an individual as was Agabus (Acts 21:11) for the safety of Saul.

The personal of the organization of the Primitive Christian Church consists of apostles, prophets, teachers, elders, deacons, administrators, and etc. There is no likeness of a three-fold hierarchy of bishops, elders, and deacons at this time. The organization does not consist of official rank in its personal; instead, these possess spiritual gifts, and are recognized as superior only when exercising their

1. Ignatius, "Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians" ch. 5.

spiritual gifts. "God did not give to all the same spiritual gifts, but different spiritual gifts to some members of the church. He made no member self-sufficient; each needs much from the other and supplies something needful to the other!"¹

CHAPTER V

The Organization of the Primitive Christian Church (Closing the Apostolic Age)

The list of the functionaries (I Cor. 12:6-8) of the former period differ somewhat with those (Eph.4:11) of this period, as revealed by the literature extending to the end of the Apostolic Age. The difference is more apparent in the title involved, than in the duties to be preformed. This may be accounted for by the fact, that both the personal and the duties of those referred to by title, are still fluid and indefinite. The officers of this period referring to themselves, or to others, leave indications of equality among those of title, in such as "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets"(Eph.3:5); implying that each, that is, each apostle and prophet had an

1.Plummer, "International Critical Commentary"(I Cor).

equal part in laying the foundation, and each received information alike. Apparently there is nothing very definite in the titles applied to these; unless the two titles as "preacher and an apostle" in "I am appointed a preacher and an apostle"(I Tim.1:11), mean the same thing, or the individual possesses an additional gift. "The object of such ministeries (Eph.4:11) is the consolidation of the society which is the body of Christ!"¹ Immediately following this account "bishops" (I Tim.3:2), "elders"(I Tim.5:1), and "deacons"(I Tim. 3:8) are referred to, apparently forming three distinct orders in the church at this time, and without question we find a distinct three-fold order soon after the close of the Apostolic Age. The second century literature reveals this is true from the following: "Since then, I have had the privilege of seeing you, through Demas your most worthy bishop, and through your worthy presbyters, Bassus and Apollonius, and through my fellowservant, the deacon Sotio, whose friendship may I ever enjoy, inasmuch as he is subject to the bishop as to the grace of God, and the presbytery as to the law of Christ,(I will now write to you)"² Our concern is not with this later development, but was

1.Dodd,"The Abingdon Bible Commentary" p.1223.

2.Ignatius,"Epistle of Ignatius to Magnesians,"ch.2.

there a three-fold hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, and deacons composing the organization of the church during the latter part of the Apostolic Age?

Paul designates the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17), when functioning, as "overseers" (Acts 20:28). In the charge to Titus the terms are used interchangeably, elders and bishops (Titus 1:5,7). Peter uses the term in the same sense (I Peter 5:1-3), as does Paul at a much later date (Acts 20:28). "The term 'overseer' seems to have arisen among the Gentile churches, and it may be that its adoption was occasioned by its employment to denote the presiding offices of civic or social societies. It would thus be the Hellenic equivalent for the Hebraic 'elder'. Whatever its origin, the office of 'overseer' was the same as that of 'elder'.¹ Following this conception, that the elder and bishop are the same, a comparison of their qualifications and duties is worth of consideration. "That the bishops are the same as the elders in the earlier age seems to follow from a comparison of Acts 20:17, with Acts 20:28, where the same individuals are called by both titles; and I Tim. 3:1-7 with I Tim. 5:17-19, the first of these passages describes the qualifications of bishops, the second of

1. Purves, "The Apostolic Age," p.250,251.

which gives regulations for elders as for those who have already been mentioned!"¹ There are no indications that these terms were confusing at this time; each term, that is "elder" and "bishop" had a pre-Christians usage both among the Greeks and Jews, and were understood to mean the one, and same office. Neither is the term "deacons" an unknown expression, but the duties are not defined. "It may be that 'deacon' became the name of a special class in the church (Phil.1:1), before the Pastoral Epistles were written, but Paul did not use the word in a technical sense!"² There is nothing in the Pastorals to show plainly that the term "deacon" has as yet acquired a clear distinction of meaning, there is no suggestion of one having official dignity; though; there is reason for believing (I Tim.3:13) that the deacon was a less significant person, who could hope to attain a higher place through good service.

Though the terms bishops, elders, and deacons do appear in the second generation of the Christian literature, as prominent characters in the church, we cannot safely deduce from this that in the Gentile churches, the primitive form of government ever roughly corresponded to a three-fold hierarchy of

1. Maclean, "Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics," Vol. 8, p. 660
 2. Hort, "The Christian Ecclesia," p. 98.

bishops, presbyters, and deacons, since the terms bishops and presbyters are used interchangeably.¹ This conception "would recognize the term 'deacon' as a minor official or office, and the term 'bishop' and 'elder' as interchangeable designations for officials of the same rank, having in the Primitive Christian Church, deacons and elders (bishops),² and not a three-fold hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, and deacons as the next century is revealed through the Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians. In the following we get a clear conception of the three-fold hierarchy, "I exhort you to study to do all things with a divine harmony, while your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons who are most dear to me!"³

The interchange of terms, presbyter, bishop, and elder continued in use until after the close of the first century. There is nothing in the Pastorals to show plainly that these terms, "elders" and "bishops" had as yet acquired a clear distinction of meaning. They seem to be used without discrimination as far as "bishops" and "elders" are concerned. While duties are

1. Streeter, "The Primitive Church" p.78.

2. Lowstuter, "The Abingdon Bible Commentary," p.1278.

3. Ignatius, "Epistle to Magnesians" ch.6.

not enumerated, certain ones are implied, but no duty or dignity is implied fro a bishop that is not just as clearly implied for an elder; qualifications for both are without distinction.

The Didache which is thought to be the earliest second century literature, reveals the fact that there were bishops and deacons in the church, and the author writing in their defense says, "Despise them not, therefore, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers!"¹ This implies that bishops were localized; and though they were not appointed over the community, they were considered along with the prophets and teachers, and evidently were a part of the organization of the church.

Clement of Rome exhorts the Corinthian Christians to submit themselves to the presbyters, for the apostles had made their earliest converts bishops and deacons; in this we notice he calls the same persons presbyters and bishops. "Having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should believe. Nor was this anything new, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scriptures in

1. "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," ch.15.

a certain place, 'I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith!'¹ The development of the church toward an organization was rapid, soon Ignatius writes, "Without the bishop ye should do nothing, also be subject to the presbytery, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ, --It is fitting also that the deacons---should in every respect be pleasing to all!"² The second century literature assign to the terms "bishop" and "elder" an official significance, imputes to them a refinement, a place of authority to both, though the bishop is superior to the elder, and an official distinction and organization throughout the church which the extant Christian literature of the Apostolic Age does not reveal only in part.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Primitive Christian Church has had a very gradual development from its inception. The form of organization and government, as reflected in the extant literature of the Apostolic Age does not correspond to, or reflect a three-fold hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, (elders) and deacons, but from every indication these are a later development,

1.Clement, "First Epistle of Clement to Corinthians"
(Vol.I,chapter 42)

2.Ignatius, "Epistle of Ignatius to Trallians"

having the former for their foundation, and claimed a power and prestige for themselves, as when Ignatius writes to the Philadelphians urging that they "Give heed to the bishops, and to the presbytery and the deacons!"¹ The indications are that at the inception of the church, no permanent organization was thought of, but that this grew in response to the necessities rather than by a deliberate plan. Types of other organizations might have been used by the early church when it felt some definite plan was necessary; as the Jewish Christians would perhaps make use of their Jewish models, while the Gentile Christians would be very likely to introduce Greek or Roman forms for their government. This was not so much a matter of their deliberate policy as an unconscious process, in which the Primitive Christian Church acquired an elastic organization, for the propagation of its teachings, and the consolidation of the society, which is the body of Christ.

1. Ignatius, "Ignatius to the Philadelphians" (ch. 7).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of the Book</u>
Allen, A.V.G.	<u>Christian Institutions</u> Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1909.
Allen, W.C.	<u>International Critical Commentary</u> (Vol. on Matt) Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1907.
Angus, Samuel.	<u>Environment of Early Christianity</u> Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1915.
Angus, Samuel.	<u>Mystery-Religions & Christianity</u> John Murry, London, 1925.
Bartlet, Jas.V.	<u>The Apostolic Age</u> Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1901.
Bicknell,	<u>A New Commentary of Holy Scripture</u> G.H.Doran Co., N.Y., 1928.
Burch, E.W.	<u>The Abingdon Bible Commentary</u> The Abingdon Press, N.Y. 1929.
Burton, E.D.	<u>International Critical Commentary</u> (Vol. on Gal.) Scribner's Sons, N.Y. 1920.
Cadoux, C.J.	<u>The Early Church and the World</u> T. and T. Clark, 1925.

- Carlyle, Dictionary of the Apostolic Church
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1916
- Carr, C. The Cambridge Bible (Matt).
University Press, Cambridge, 1916.
- Case, S.J. The Evolution of Early Christianity
University Press, Chicago, 1914.
- Clement. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Vol.I)
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1925.
- Cyprian. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Vol.V)
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1925.
- Davies, J.N. The Abingdon Bible Commentary
The Abingdon Press, N.Y. 1929.
- Dodd, C.H. The Abingdon Bible Commentary
The Abingdon Press, N.Y. 1929.
- DuBuisson, A New Commentary of Holy Scripture
G.H.Doran Co., N.Y., 1928.
- Duchesne, M.L. Early History of the Christian Church
Longmans, Green & Co., N.Y. 1923.
- Dummelow, J.R. Commentary on the Holy Bible
Macmillan Co., N.Y. 1909.
- Findlay, G.G. The Cambridge Bible
(Vol. on Thess),
University Press, Cambridge, 1894.
- Foakes-Jackson, P.J. Studies in the Life of Early Church
G.H.Doran Co., N.Y., 1924.
-

- Fowler, H.T. History & Literature of the N.T.
Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1925.
- Gilbert, G.H. The Greek Thoughts in the N.T.
Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1928.
- Gould, E.P. International Critical Commentary
(Vol. on Mark)
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1896.
- Greenstone, J.H. The Jewish Encyclopaedia (Vol. V.)
Funk & Wagnall's Co., N.Y., 1907.
- Halliday, W.R. Pagan Background of Early Christianity
University Press, Liverpool, 1925.
- Hill, Wm.B. The Apostolic Age
Revell Co., N.Y., 1922.
- Kidd, B.J. Documents of History of the Church
Macmillan Co., 1920.
- Kohler, K. The Origin of the Synagogue & Church
Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1929.
- Lambert, J.C. International Standard Bible
Encyclopedia
Lakeside Press, Chicago, 1915.
- Lias, J.J. The Cambridge Bible (Corinthians)
University Press, Cambridge,
- Lumby, J.R. The Cambridge Bible (Acts)
University Press, Cambridge, 1885.
-

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Maclean, A.J. | <u>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</u>
(Art. on Ministry, Vol. 3, P. 659-674)
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1924. |
| McCown, C.C. | <u>The Promise of His Coming</u>
Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1921. |
| McCown, C.C. | <u>The Abingdon Bible Commentary</u>
The Abingdon Press, N.Y., 1929. |
| McGiffert, A.C. | <u>The Apostolic Age</u>
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1906. |
| Menzies, Allen. | <u>Commentary of the Bible (Peake's)</u>
Nelson and Sons, London, 1919. |
| Moffatt, Jas. | <u>Introduction to Literature of the N.T.</u>
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1927. |
| Moffatt, Jas. | <u>The Approach to the New Testament</u>
Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922. |
| Moffatt, Jas., ed. | <u>The Expansion of Christianity</u>
Putnam's Sons, N.Y., 1904. |
| Montenore, C.G. | <u>The Synoptic Gospels (Vols. I & II)</u>
R.R. Clark, London, 1927. |
| Neander, A. | <u>Planting & Training of Christian Church</u>
Campbell & Co., Philadelphia, 1844. |
| Orr, James. | <u>History & Literature of Early Church</u>
Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1901. |
| Peake, A.S. | <u>Commentary of the Bible</u>
Nelson & Sons, London, 1919. |

- Plummer, A. International Critical Commentary
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1911.
- Purves, G.T. The Apostolic Age
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1900.
- Pamphilus, Ante-Nicene Fathers, (Vol. VI)
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1925.
- Rackham, R.B. The Acts of the Apostles
Methuen & Co., London, 1904.
- Robertson, A.T. International Standard Bible
Encyclopaedia
Lakeside Press, Chicago, 1915.
- Robertson, J.A. The Abingdon Bible Commentary
The Abingdon Press, N.Y., 1929.
- Robinson, T.H., ed. Moffatt's N.T. Commentary
Doubleday, Doran & Co., N.Y., 1928.
- Schaff, P. Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1919.
- Singer, I., ed. The Jewish Encyclopaedia
Funk & Wagnall's Co., N.Y., 1907.
- Scott, E.F. The Beginning of the Church
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1914.
- Scott, E.F. The First Age of Christianity
Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1926.
- Scott, E.F. The Gospel and Its Tributaries
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1929.
-

- Streeter, B.H. The Four Gospels
Macmillan Co., N.Y. 1925.
- Streeter, B.H. The Primitive Church
Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1929.
- Tertullain. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Vol. III)
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1925.
- Uhlhorn, G. Christian Charity in the Ancient Church
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1883.
- Wernle, Paul. The Beginning of Christianity
Putnam's Sons N.Y., 1903.
- Weiss, B., ed. A Commentary on the New Testament
Funk & Wagnell's Co., N.Y., 1906.
- Lowstuter, W.J. The Abingdon Bible Commentary
The Abingdon Press, N.Y., 1929.
- Ignatius. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Vol. I).
Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1925.

End of

The organization of the primitive Christian Church

This title was preceded by

The idea personality as a basis of ethics
Clement of Alexandria : his life and writings
The religious aspects of the theory of value

And is continued by

The later life of St. Paul after the close of the Acts of
the Apostles

Search by above titles on archive.org to
continue reading this collection of Pacific
School of Religion Theses from 1931
call number Thesis Cage 1931 v.2